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DAWN

NFC award blamed for provinces missing tax targets

• FBR chief cites 'poor' collection of farm income, services and property taxes • PIA privatisation and transparency also comes under discussion

By Khalid Hasnain

LAHORE: The provinces have little incentive to improve the collection of three major taxes as they continue to receive an adequate share from the federal government under the National Finance Commission (NFC) award, prominent officials and economic experts said on Sunday.

"The provinces are mainly collecting three major taxes — sales tax on services, agriculture income tax and property tax," Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) Chairman Rashid Mahmood Langrial said, adding that they were performing "poorly" in all these areas.

He was speaking at a session titled 'NFC, Governance and the Crisis of Money' on the concluding day of the ThinkFest event held here.

Former finance minister Miftah Ismail opened the session as moderator and informed the participants on the distribution of funds under the NFC award.

He said 57.5 per cent of the total federal government revenues were transferred to the provinces. In addition, the federation gives one per cent of revenues to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for combating terrorism and also supports the Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan governments financially.

He said sales tax on goods was still collected by the federation, while tax on services was the responsibility of the provinces.

FBR chief Langrial appreciated the provinces for improvements in governance, including cleanliness and other development initiatives.

However, he was critical of their performance in terms of tax collection.

"I will tell you the numbers. Of the total agriculture income tax base of Rs3.7 trillion, the provinces are collecting just Rs8.4 billion," he said.

He said property tax collection by provinces stood at only 0.08 per cent of GDP in Pakistan, compared to 5pc in Malaysia, 3pc in Indonesia and 2pc in India.

He added that per capita property tax collection in Lahore was Rs623, against Rs1,276 in Chandigarh.

"In Karachi, the per capita tax collection amounts to just Rs111, whereas in Bangalore it stands at Rs11,233," he said.

Mr Langrial said provinces needed to collect more taxes as their revenue gap was too much, while the federation should also minimise its expenses.

Economist Savail Hussain said transfers from the federation to provinces continued rising from 2001 to 2009, but outcomes in terms of the Human Development Index (HDI), except in Balochistan, remained below the mark.

"At present, we have a public finance crisis that can only be overcome if both the federation and provinces sit together and make the NFC performance-based," he said.

Asad Sayeed, a member of the 2009 NFC, said all stakeholders had agreed to raise the tax-to-GDP ratio to 13.5pc by 2015, but the FBR had crossed only 10pc so far.

Privatisation

In another session, speakers discussed the government's ongoing privatisation of state-owned enterprises. The session, titled 'Privatisation: An Easier Route or Structural Change', was moderated by Ms Rahat Kaunain Hassan.

The speakers included Privatisation Commission Chairman Muhammad Ali and Arif Habib Group CEO Nasim Beg, while former Privatisation Commission chairman Muhammad Zubair also spoke.

Mr Beg said the consortium that recently won the bidding for Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) would focus on reviving international operations and improving domestic services despite facing a massive competition.

PC Chairman Muhammad Ali dispelled the impression that valuable PIA land would be transferred to the bidder, saying only international and domestic offices would be taken over.

Mr Zubair asked why PIA was not privatised in 2023 and 2024 despite similar bid prices, and raised concerns over the recent appointment of a new chairman despite the privatisation process.

PMD warns of more road closures, landslides

• Predicts heavy snowfall likely to cause slippery roads in GB, upper KP, Kashmir, and parts of Balochistan • Govt imposes ban on picnicking and camping in Ziarat and Kachhi districts
• Earthquake-hit Chipurson Valley residents continue to suffer in freezing temperatures

By Jamil Nagri and Saleem Shahid

ISLAMABAD/QUETTA/GILGIT: The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) on Sunday warned of road closures and landslides in the country's upper parts from Jan 26 to 27 due to heavy snowfall, advising citizens to remain "extra cautious".

In a statement, the Met Office said heavy snowfall could cause road closures and slippery conditions in Naran, Kaghan, Dir, Swat, Kalam, Chitral, Kohistan, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Shangla, Astore, Hunza, Skardu, Murree, Galliyat, Neelum Valley, Bagh, Poonch, Haveli, Quetta, Ziarat, Chaman, Pishin, Qila Abdullah, Qila Saifullah, Nushki, Harnai, and Zhob.

It further warned of a possibility of landslides and avalanches in hilly areas of upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Kashmir during the period.

The PMD advised tourists to avoid unnecessary travel and remain extra cautious over the next two days.

Picnicking banned

Meanwhile, the Balochistan government has imposed a ban on picnicking and camping at tourist points in Ziarat and Kachhi districts.

The decision has been taken in view of the prevailing harsh cold weather and the forecast of heavy rain and snowfall from Monday (today).

Deputy commissioners of both Kachhi and Ziarat have imposed the ban under Section 144 until further orders.

According to official notifications issued by the deputy commissioners, the decision was taken on the directives of the Director General, Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA), Balochistan, in view of prevailing and anticipated winter hazards. These include extreme cold, heavy snowfall, landslides, roads blockages and other recurring risks.

HEAVY boulders block the Astore Valley road, leaving travellers on both sides stranded.—Dawn

The notifications stated that immediate preventative measures were necessary to safeguard public life and property within the limits of both districts.

There will be a complete ban on picnic spots and tourist destinations, riverbanks, nullahs, dams, mountainous and hilly areas, as well as other identified vulnerable and high-risk locations in Ziarat and Kachhi districts.

"Complete prohibition has been imposed on entering, gathering, camping, picnicking, swimming, and unnecessary movement of the general public at the above-mentioned locations during the enforcement period. Non-essential travel to high-risk areas during adverse weather conditions is strictly prohibited," the notification said.

It further warned that any act endangering human life or obstructing emergency and relief operation would be dealt with in accordance with the law.

The district administrations of both districts have directed the SSPs and other concerned authorities to strictly implement these orders.

Hardships

People in Gilgit-Baltistan, particularly earthquake-affected residents of Chipurson Valley in Gojal, Hunza, continue to suffer due to road blockages, prolonged electricity shortages, disruptive mobile and internet connectivity, and the absence of heating facilities amid freezing temperatures.

Heavy snowfall across Gilgit-Baltistan from Thursday to Friday brought life to a standstill.

According to police, heavy snowfall and landslides disrupted roads connecting upper areas of Astore, Skardu, Ghanche, Kharmang, Shigar, Ghizer, Hunza, and Nagar. Linking roads to upper regions became slippery and risky for travel.

The Gilgit-Baltistan Communication and Works Department said in a statement that several roads, including the Astore Valley Road, had been reopened for traffic. Traffic on the Karakoram Highway, Ghizer–Shandur Road, and Baltistan Road has also been restored.

On Saturday evening,Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police halted passenger vehicles travelling from Rawalpindi to Gilgit-Baltistan as a precautionary measure, citing dangerous road conditions due to snowfall during night hours. As a result, thousands of passengers remained stranded near Abbottabad for several hours, where some staged protests.

Residents of earthquake-hit Chipurson Valley continue to face severe difficulties, with hundreds of people still living in tents after the recent earthquake damaged or cracked many homes.

Across the region, people are facing over 20 hours of electricity load-shedding. In Gahkuch, the headquarters of Ghizer district, residents staged a protest demonstration against prolonged power outages.

Earlier, the Gilgit-Baltistan government issued a travel advisory for tourists, stating that heavy snowfall had been recorded in Hunza, Nagar, Ghizer, Astore, Skardu, Shigar, Ghanche, Kharmang, and Diamer.

Transition to clean energy govt's top priority: president

Says Pakistan targets 30pc electric vehicles by 2030

By Bakhtawar Mian

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has said that the transition to clean energy is Pakistan's top priority, with a target of achieving 30 per cent electric vehicles by 2030.

"Pakistan is among the countries most vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change. For this reason, the government has placed the transition to clean energy at the heart of its climate and development agenda. Under its commitments to the UNFCCC, as reflected in the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) 2025, Pakistan has set the target of 30pc electric vehicles by 2030," President Zardari said in his message on the International Day of Clean Energy.

The president said the shift to clean energy was not only an environmental necessity but also an opportunity for economic growth, job creation, and technological progress. By encouraging innovation, mobilising investment, and strengthening institutional capacity, Pakistan aims to build an energy system that is reliable, affordable, resilient, and sustainable for all citizens.

He urged the nation to reaffirm its resolve to build a climate resilient, low-carbon, and energy-secure Pakistan, and, as a responsible member of the global community, to support the development and adoption of technologies that sustain and improve the planet, while moving away from those that threaten its existence.

President Zardari said the International Day of Clean Energy highlighted the central role of clean, affordable, and sustainable energy in inclusive development, energy security, and the global response to climate change.

He noted that air pollution has become a harsh and recurring reality for the people of Pakistan. Each year, dense smog and fog lead to serious traffic accidents, flight cancellations, disruption of train services, and closure of motorways. Schools are forced to shut, businesses suffer loses, and hospitals receive patients struggling to breathe clean air. While air purifiers have become common in affluent households, millions of citizens remain exposed to hazardous conditions, underscoring the deep social and economic cost of polluted air.

ANP demands uniform policy on terror across the country

Aimal Wali blames former military, political leaders for prevailing security situation in KP

By Imran Ayub

KARACHI: The Awami National Party (ANP) on Sunday called for a comprehensive and uniform policy to eliminate terrorism and extremism, rejecting the "state's past distinction between good and bad militants".

Addressing a rally, organised by the party's Sindh chapter to mark the 38th death anniversary of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (Bacha Khan) and the 20th death anniversary of Khan Abdul Wali Khan, ANP chief Senator Aimal Wali Khan said that if the state has concluded that militants are "khawarij" and a "fitna", then accountability must also be extended to those who, in the past, facilitated their return and re-settlement in Pakistan.

He also called for harsh punishments for former military and civilian leaders who were responsible for bringing militants back and resettling them in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which had resulted in the current security situation.

He said that repeated military operations had failed to eradicate terrorism, arguing that peace in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa could only be achieved through a coordinated, people-centric policy formulated by the federal government, the KP government and all stakeholders.

"Operations are not a permanent solution. Terrorism is the real problem but over 50 operations have not delivered lasting peace," he said.

Rejecting any linkage between Pashtuns and militancy, the ANP senator said Pashtuns were peaceloving, asserting they had no association with the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan or any extremist ideology.

He expressed concern over the situation in Tirah, calling for an end to displacement in the name of security operations and criticised both the federal and provincial governments for "neglect and misgovernance".

The ANP leader also stressed the need to strengthen the 18th Constitutional Amendment and establish a truly empowered local government system, arguing that public issues could only be resolved by devolving powers at grassroots level and extending NFC Award principles to local bodies.

Commenting on foreign policy, he questioned Pakistan's participation in the Gaza Peace Board without taking the parliament into confidence, demanding clarity on how the move would benefit both Pakistan and the Palestinian people.

On the recent Gul Plaza fire tragedy in Karachi, the ANP leader described it as a reflection of systemic decay and corruption. He urged political parties, particularly the PPP and MQM, to avoid blame game and instead focus on relief and justice for the victims' families.

Reaffirming ANP's commitment to Karachi, he said the party was ready to work with all stakeholders for the city's development and harmony.

ANP Sindh President Shahi Syed, in his speech, said Bacha Khan's message was of peace and non-violence and therefore the ANP's politics had always been rooted in democracy and loyalty to Pakistan.

Climate-proof revival of girls' schools in Swat urged

By Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: A rapid assessment of 120 girls' schools in Swat district, carried out by Unesco, has revealed widespread damage to roofs, walls, and basic water and sanitation facilities, and called for a climate-resilient recovery to keep students learning safely.

In a bid to restore safe learning environments, Unesco launched a rapid education infrastructure damage and climate resilience assessment across 120 government primary schools in four flood-affected areas of Swat. It found that more than 12,000 girls have been affected, with many continuing to learn, often in unsafe conditions. The results of the assessment were announced on Friday.

The assessment, carried out in the sub-districts of Bahrain, Charbagh, Khwazakhela and Matta, found that 46 per cent of schools reported leaking or damaged roofs, while 31pc reported damaged boundary walls, raising safety and protection concerns, especially for girls.

One in four schools lacked safe drinking water, 35pc did not have fully functional sanitation facilities, directly affecting attendance, and 93pc had no functional psychosocial or protection referral mechanism, leaving children, particularly vulnerable girls, without structured support.

Unesco's assessment called for risk-informed, climate-resilient recovery., especially for schools located near riverbanks, streams and landslide-prone areas.

It recommended to the government to rebuild roofs and boundary walls, restore electricity, and secure learning spaces to make schools safe.

Fixing water and sanitation facilities quickly would ensure safe drinking water, functional toilets for girls and reliable hygiene facilities.

Yasmin Rashid labels wearable cam policy 'headline-friendly' sham

• Says cameras in gynae depts crosses a 'red line'; accuses govt of choosing 'surveillance' over reforms • Claims weak data laws risk leaks, political misuse; alleges no healthcare, patient groups consulted on this policy • References Quaid-i-Azam's decision on health privacy

By Mansoor Malik and Ikram Junaidi

LAHORE/ ISLAMABAD: Incarcerated former Punjab health minister Dr Yasmin Rashid has criticised the provincial government's decision to mandate body-worn cameras for nurses and frontline hospital staff, warning the move will compromise medical confidentiality and erode patient trust.

In a message relayed from Kot Lakhpat Jail through PTI leader and lawyer Shayan Bashir on Sunday, Ms Rashid argued that introducing continuous audio-visual recording in clinical environments risks fundamentally altering the relationship between medics and patients.

"Patients disclose personal information — physical, psychological, reproductive and familial — precisely because medical spaces are protected from exposure and surveillance," Ms Rashid said.

"Even when recordings are not misused, the knowledge that one is being recorded can change patient behaviour, suppress honest disclosure, and discourage vulnerable populations from seeking timely care."

The Punjab government recently announced the camera initiative, framing it as a measure for transparency and accountability in response to public dissatisfaction with state hospitals.

However, Ms Rashid asserted that authorities have chosen "surveillance over reform".

"Hospitals are not police stations," she said. "They are spaces where people disclose their most intimate fears, illnesses and vulnerabilities."

A gynaecologist by profession, Ms Rashid expressed particular alarm regarding the policy's impact on women's health services. She stated that childbirth and gynaecological care involve physical exposure and emotional fragility, arguing that recording in such settings crosses a red line.

"No circular, no SOP, no press conference can undo the damage caused when a woman feels watched instead of cared for," she stated.

Ms Rashid also questioned the administrative execution of the decision, noting there was no meaningful consultation with nurses, doctors' associations, or patient-rights groups.

She raised structural concerns regarding data privacy, asking who would own the footage, how long it would be stored, and whether patients could refuse recording.

"In a system where data protection is weak and political misuse of information is not hypothetical, these are not technical gaps but structural dangers," Rashid said.

To illustrate the ethical weight of privacy, Ms Rashid cited the historical example of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, whose serious illness was kept confidential during the Pakistan Movement.

She noted that this was an ethical judgement rooted in the understanding that medical privacy can carry consequences far beyond the individual.

The former minister contended that cameras are being used to scapegoat staff.

She noted that issues such as staff shortages, medicine stock-outs, and broken equipment cannot be solved by surveillance. Instead, she called for patient exit interviews, independent grievance redressal, and training for paramedical staff in patient rights and de-escalation.

"Healthcare reform is slow and often invisible. Surveillance is quick and headline-friendly," she stated. "But a government that confuses the two is not fixing healthcare. It is managing optics while trust quietly collapses."

Mr Bashir confirmed that the message was dictated during his legal visit with the former minister. He added that the party plans to continue its agitation for the release of former PM Imran Khan.

Previously, there appeared to be agreement among healthcare workers and officials interviewed by *Dawn* that the policy may be unsustainable, could infringe on privacy, might be incompatible with medical professions, and potentially catastrophic.

Pakistan Medical Association President Dr Izhar Ahmed Chaudhry conveyed his incredulity to *Dawn*, asserting that the proposed action would be an ineffective method for healthcare improvement and will harm the government's image.

For Young Doctors Association (YDA) Punjab President Dr Shoaib Niazi, the decision was a "useless act" for which the association was "not consulted".

"The footage will go to the IT department, and anyone can access it without patients' consent," Dr Niazi said.